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What is Eemaan?

What is true *eemaan*, or faith? Who is a true believer (*mu'min*)? What are the essential elements, or articles, of *eemaan*? These questions are of vital importance. In fact, this is what Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) explained to Angel Jibreel (عليه السلام) when the latter asked him about *eemaan*.

When Angel Jibreel (عليه السلام) asked the Prophet (ﷺ), "What is faith (*eemaan*)?" He replied, "It is to believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day, and to believe in the Divine Decree (*al-qadar*), both the good of it and the bad of it." (Muslim)

Eemaan is a Statement and Action

Eemaan is a statement and action. In other words, it has three essential elements: belief in the heart, profession by the tongue and performance of the deeds by the physical parts of the body.

1. Belief in the Heart

The heart is the locus of *eemaan* as well as its foundation. The Qur'an says,

يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ لَا يَحْزُنْكَ الَّذِينَ يُسْرِعُونَ فِي الْكُفْرِ
مِنَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَلَمْ تُؤْمِنْ قُلُوبُهُمْ

"O Messenger, let not those who race each other into disbelief not grieve you, those who say 'We believe' with their lips, but whose hearts have no faith." (*Surat al-Maa'idah*, 5: 41)

Hence, *eemaan* is the statement of 'the heart'. It is made up of recognition, knowledge and affirmation. In other words, a believer recognizes that there is none worthy of worship except Allah. He has knowledge of this truth and he affirms it in his heart.

The second element of *eemaan* is the actions of the heart. This aspect of *eemaan* is made up of commitment, voluntary surrender and acceptance. These include, among other things, love of Allah, awe of Him, trust in Him, heedfulness of His commands and prohibitions, fear of Him and hope in Him.

2. Declaration of Faith with the Tongue

The second essential element of *eemaan* is to declare one's faith with the tongue. In this case, one testifies that one recognizes the truthfulness of the testimony of the faith and intends

to adhere to the commands and guidance of what he has testified to. Mere pronouncement of the words in themselves is not enough.

3. Performance of Righteous Deeds by the Body Parts

Eemaan is a statement and action. Faith increases by acts of obedience to Allah and decreases by acts of disobedience. The heart is the driving force behind all actions. If the heart is filled with *eemaan*—with the love of Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ), fear of Allah, hope in Him, amongst other things—it will certainly prompt the body to perform acts of obedience to Allah. It will keep him away from forbidden, shameful and even doubtful or dubious acts. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "There is a lump of flesh in the body; when it is sound, the whole body is sound; but when it becomes corrupted, the whole body also becomes corrupted. It is the heart." (Part of a *hadeeth* reported by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim)

Faith, however, differs from one believer to another, and true faith is one that is expressed in actions, as Almighty Allah says, **"And this is Paradise which you have been made to inherit because of your deeds which you used to do [in the life of the world]."** (*Surat al-Hijr*, 43:72)

Branches of Faith

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Faith has sixty-odd or seventy-odd branches; the highest and the best of which is to declare that there is no god worthy of worship but Allah, and the lowest of which is to remove something harmful from the road. Modesty, too, is a branch of faith." (Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim)

If *eemaan* has different branches and each part is called *eemaan*, it follows that *salaat* is *eemaan*, *Zakaat* is *eemaan*, and *Hajj* is *eemaan*. Virtues such as modesty, trust, fear of Allah, heedfulness of Allah, and total submission to His will, even removing a harmful thing from the way, are parts of *eemaan*. Some of these parts are very basic: like the two testimonies of faith. If you lose them, you lose *eemaan* completely. Others are marginal, such as removing an obstacle from the way. If, for any reason, you lose them, you do not lose *eemaan* completely. Instead, you have moved from the lofty level of *eemaan* to its lower level.

There are a number of things that testify to one's true faith. These include the following:

1. Loving the Prophet (ﷺ) more than one loves one's parents and children. (See al-Bukhaaree, 1:14)

A. Fill in the blanks.

1. The _____ is the locus of *eemaan*.
2. _____ is the driving force behind all actions.
3. Faith has _____ branches.
4. According to a *hadeeth*, the lowest degree of faith is to _____ something harmful from the road.
5. “A thief while stealing is not a _____ believer.”

B. Answer the following questions.

1. What are the three essential elements of *eemaan*?

2. What aspects does belief in the heart consist of?

3. What does profession of faith by the tongue entail?
